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Biotechnology Notes

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Biotechnology Notes, a compilation of agency activities, news events, and upcoming meetings, is prepared for members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Committee on Biotechnology in Agriculture (CBA) by USDA's Office of Agricultural Biotechnology (OAB).

INSIDE USDA

GROUP TO REVIEW SLAUGHTER NEEDS FOR TRANSGENIC FOOD ANIMALS

Any research animal that has been given a drug, a biological (toxins, vaccines, and sera), food additive, or pesticide chemical must meet certain criteria before it can be entered into the food supply. So sayeth USDA's research animal regulations. One category of research animals, however -- those termed "transgenic" -- is not currently covered by these regulations, which were written before the field of transgenics was conceived.

Even though there are no transgenic animals at this time ready to go to slaughter, the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) wants to clarify its procedures and has sought the advice of the Department's scientific advisory body -- the Agricultural Biotechnology Research Advisory Committee (ABRAC).

To help the ABRAC in its deliberations, a meeting will first take place of transgenic animal experts. They will review a "decision tree" that lays out the responsibilities of FSIS and other agencies concerning transgenic animals and then forward their recommendations to the ABRAC. The public is invited to attend the meeting which takes place April 8 in Room 3109 of USDA's South Building, 14th and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more details, please call Alvin Young, Director, Office of Agricultural Biotechnology (OAB), at 703-235-4419.

THE BARD FUND: A WIN-WIN FOR AGRICULTURE

The U.S.-Israel Binational Agricultural Research and Development Fund (BARD) was set up in 1977 to promote and support research and development in agriculture for the mutual benefit of both countries. Proposals for grants are accepted by BARD from public or private non-profit research institutions whose primary activity is research. Proposals should reach BARD by September 1 of each year.

Projects may be uni-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary and may cover any or all phases of research and development. A few of the areas of research supported by BARD include:

agricultural economics, aquaculture, animal production, cellular and molecular biology, crop production and new technology, crop protection, and soil and water conservation. Post-doctoral and research fellowship programs are also available.

To learn more about BARD, call Lynn Gipe, International Program Assistant, USDA/Agricultural Research Service, at 301-504-5605.

NEWS AROUND THE NATION (AND THE WORLD)

ENGLAND RULES FAVORABLY ON BST

The Medicines Commission of the United Kingdom (UK) has decided that BST (bovine somatotropin) meets the UK's criteria for product licensing. Normally, such a decision on the part of the Commission would quickly lead to product commercialization. This time, however, there is a snag. The European Community's Council of Ministers imposed a licensing moratorium on BST. Although the moratorium is due to end December 31, 1993, there are several more hurdles to overcome before it can be sold in the U.K. Stay tuned for more developments.

NEW MARINE RESEARCH CENTER PLANNED

Marine researchers will be setting up shop next year at a major facility being constructed on Piers 5 and 6 of Baltimore, Maryland's Inner Harbor. Scientists from COMB -- the Center of Marine Biotechnology -- will use biotechnology to study reproduction, growth, development, and disease control of finfish and shellfish. They will conduct transgenic fish research and delve into the mysterious world of marine ecology.

COMB is one of six research centers of the Maryland Biotechnology Institute. Its faculty are involved in collaborative research with industry and undertake projects that would be impractical for any one small company to conduct. When completed, the new facility will become the scientific cornerstone of the Christopher Columbus Center, a multi-purpose marine research, training, and exhibition facility slated for completion in December 1994. For more information about COMB, please call Robert Hando at 301-403-4691; Fax: 301-403-4693.

CALIFORNIA WORKSHOPS TARGET FOOD PROS

Just what *is* agricultural biotechnology, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture? How does molecular genetics work? What *are* the food safety issues and what about all the hoopla over food labelling? These are a few of the issues being tackled in a series of workshops and focus groups specifically targeted for organic farmers, winery owners, specialty food processors, restaurant owners, chefs, and food journalists in the San Francisco Bay area.

According to Susanne Huttner, Director of the University of California Systemwide Biotechnology Research and Education Program, the series is designed to provide factual information as well as assess the attitudes, knowledge, and information needs of the specific audiences. Information gleaned from this project will be shared with California's Cooperative Extension staff, community food/farm opinion leaders, and government officials to help them prepare educational projects dealing with agricultural biotechnology. A final report is due this spring. To learn more about the workshops, please call Susanne Huttner at 310-206-6814.

A YEAR IN REVIEW: NEW STATE LEGISLATIVE SURVEY OUT

Anyone interested in tracking all the major biotechnology-related legislation considered or acted on by state legislatures last year may want to order a copy of "*Year-End Survey of State Government Legislation on Biotechnology*." It was prepared by the Biotechnology Industrial Organization and gives a bill-by-bill rundown as well as a look at trends and issues. To receive a copy of the survey, please call 202-857-0244.

EPA PROPOSES AMENDING REGULATIONS

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed an amended rule governing the small-scale field testing of certain microbial pesticides. Microbial pesticides consist of naturally occurring or genetically modified microorganisms that include bacteria, fungi, viruses and protozoans. The proposed regulation focuses on microbial pesticides that could have properties with the potential to cause new or significant impacts on human health or the environment. The Agency's action has the two-fold goal of reducing the regulatory burden on the biotechnology industry, which manufactures and tests microbial pesticide products, while providing this industry clear direction on the scope and timing of EPA's oversight of such products.

The procedure would require that a company notify the Agency before beginning a small-scale field test. The Agency would then review the notification, assess any potential for adverse impacts, and then decide whether a permit is needed.

EPA is accepting comments on its proposed rule until March 23. The rule is published in the January 22 Federal Register (Volume 58, No. 13). For more details, call Frederick Betz, Acting Chief, Science Analysis and Coordination Staff, EPA, at 703-305-6307.

A QUESTION OF STANDARDS

If standardization of containment practices, facilities design, and environmental issues is your field of interest, then you may want to attend a "Workshop on Standardization Needs in Biotechnology" to be held in Gaithersburg, MD, April 26-27. The workshop is intended to identify the need for consensus standards and to organize the resources to develop standards. It will also serve as a forum for industry, university, and government representatives to discuss standards of mutual interest. The workshop is sponsored by the National Institute of Standards and Technology in cooperation with the American Society for Testing and Materials Committee E48 on Biotechnology. For more information, call Lura Powell at 301-975-2627.

IN CASE YOU WEREN'T THERE

- "International Conference on Law and Genetics" was the focus of a conference held January 20-22 in Bordeaux, France. Guest speaker Michael A. Lidsky, Deputy Director for Biotechnology Coordination and Technical Assistance at USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, discussed the Federal Government's program for regulating products of biotechnology. He explained the APHIS proposal to allow the introduction of certain regulated articles via notifications, the Department's decision to no longer regulate the "Flavr Savr" tomato, and the submission of petitions for determinations of nonregulated status.
- Daniel Jones, OAB Deputy Director, served as a member of the Biotechnology Research Review Subcommittee of the Ecological Processes and Effects Committee of the EPA science advisory board, February 18-19, in Gulf Breeze, Florida. The subcommittee reviewed ongoing research programs and a revised research issue plan. It will release its recommendations later this year. The plan is divided into seven project areas: bioassay techniques, gene survival, micro/mesocosms, risk assessment methods for pesticidal plants, risk control research, health effects, and containment and decontamination in large-scale facilities. For more details about the subcommittee, the plan, or the recommendations, please call Stephanie Sanzone at 202-260-6552.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

- *Tropical Plant Cell and Tissue Culture*. Published by Lii Jang Liu, University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, PR. To receive a copy call 809-767-9705; Fax: 809-758-5158.
- "Canadian Biotechnology 1993." Includes agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, environment, regulatory and other subject areas. For more information, please call 416-873-1295; Fax: 416-873-6133.
- 1992 National Biotechnology Policy Board Report. Prepared by the National Institutes of Health. To receive a copy, call Nelson Wivel at 301-496-9838.
- "Animal Biotechnology: Opportunities and Challenges." Edited by J. F. MacDonald. Published by the National Agricultural Biotechnology Council, Ithaca, NY 1992. To order a copy write to NABC/BTI, 159 Biotechnology Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-2703.
- "Educational Programs About Biotechnology." 1993 Limited Edition. Prepared by the Association of Biotechnology Companies. To order write to ABC, 1666 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 330, Washington, DC 20009.
- "DOE New Technology." Published by the U.S. Department of Energy. November 1992. Contains information on how to access specific technologies developed through research sponsored by DOE and performed by DOE laboratories or by contracted researchers. Describes technologies with potential for commercial applications and contains a catalog of current patent applications and patents available for licensing. To order a copy, write to the National Technical Information Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, 5285 Port Royal Rd., Springfield, VA 22161.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

March 4: "New Wine in Old Bottles: A Comparative Review of Biotechnology Regulation" is the title of a lecture being given by Sheila Jasanoff, professor at Cornell University. The lecture takes place at the University of California in San Francisco. It is sponsored by Genentech Inc., GTE Foundation, and the UC Systemwide Biotechnology Research and Education Program. For additional information, please call 414-502-2594.

March 9: "Biotechnology Patents." Washington, DC. Sponsored by the Washington Metropolitan Chapter of the Association of Biotechnology Companies. To make a reservation, please call Richard Okiuye at 202-234-3330.

March 22-23: Conference on Commercial Biotechnology: Perceptions and Realities. Newton, MA. Call 203-853-4266; Fax: 203-853-0348.

March 28-30: Intellectual Properties in Agriculture and Forestry. Northern Virginia. Sponsored by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. For more details and to register, please call 703-231-5182.

March 29-31: Genetic Manipulation of Plant Metabolism and Growth. Norwich, Norfolk, UK. For details write to M.J.C. Rhodes, AFRC Institute of Food Research, Colney Lane, Norwich, Norfolk NR4, 7UA, UK; Telephone: 060-35-6122.

March 31-April 3: Twelfth Annual Symposium: Current Topics in Plant Biochemistry, Molecular Biology and Physiology. Columbia, MO. Call Doug Randall at 314-882-7796; Fax: 314-882-5635.

April 2: "Biotech in Your Backyard." An interactive video teleconference on the public policy issues surrounding biotechnology. Sponsored by four universities, the National Ag Biotechnology Council, and OAB. To be broadcast from 2-4 p.m eastern time. Call Dave King for more details at 317-494-8396; Fax: 317-496-1117.

April 5-8: "The Risk Assessment Paradigm After Ten Years: Policy and Practice Then, Now, and in the Future." Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. Sponsored by Armstrong Laboratory, the Naval Medical Research Institute Detachment, the Army Biomedical Research and Development Laboratory, and EPA. For details call Lois Doncaster at 513-256-3600, ext. 212.

April 8: Meeting of USDA's Agricultural Biotechnology Research Advisory Committee Group on Transgenic Animals. Washington, DC. For details call Daniel Jones, OAB Deputy Director, at 703-235-4419.

April 12-16: ABC (Association of Biotechnology Companies) 7th International Biotechnology Meeting and Exhibition. Research Triangle Park, NC. Hosted by the North Carolina Biotechnology Center. For details call 202-234-3330; Fax: 202-234-3565.

April 19-22: First International Symposium on the Biology of Adventitious Root Formation. Texas. For details call Edith Franson, USDA Forestry Sciences Lab, Box 898, Rhinelander, WI 54501.

April 21-25: Molecular Genetics of Plant-Microbe Interactions. East Brunswick, NJ. Call 908-932-9271; Fax: 908-932-8276.

April 26-27: Workshop on Standardization Needs in Biotechnology. Gaithersburg, MD. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

May 23-26: International Vectors in Recombinant Vectors in Vaccine Development. Albany, NY. Co-sponsored by USDA/APHIS, the National Institutes of Health, and the Food and Drug Administration. For details call Kathleen Cavanagh at 518-474-7760; Fax: 518-474-3439.

June 5-9: 1993 Congress on Cell and Tissue Culture. "Growth Control: From the Receptor to the Nucleus. San Diego, CA. Sponsored by the Tissue Culture Association Inc. For details call 410-992-0946; Fax: 410-992-0949.

June 20-26: International Workshop on Sustainable Land Management for the 21st Century. The University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. For details call 1-403-329-2244; Fax: 1-403-329-5166.

July 25-30: "Third International Symposium on the Molecular Biology of the Potato." Santa Cruz, CA. Sponsored by USDA, Monsanto Inc., Frito Lay Inc., J.R. Simplot Inc., and Rhone Poulenc. For more information, please write to William Belknap, USDA-ARS, 800 Buchanan St., Albany, CA 94710.

July 28-30: Penn State's Twelfth Summer Symposium in Molecular Biology, "The Structure/Function Relationships in Proteins and Enzymes." University Park, PA. For

NOTES

Biotechnology Notes is written by Marti Asner, public affairs specialist in USDA's Office of Agricultural Biotechnology. Suggestions for future issues are always appreciated and may be sent to USDA/OAB, Room 1001, Rosslyn Plaza East, 14th and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, DC 20250-2200. Phone: 703-235-4419; Fax: 703-235-4429.